

.... seeing the power of God at work....

by Yozo Takeuchi

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him,

Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus answered,

It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work.

John 9: 1-5 RSV

I agonized a long time before I came to understand the meaning of these words of Scripture. That a person must be born blind just to show forth the works of God is truly a paradox, and a very cruel one, it seemed to me.

This was because we had been given as our first son a child who had cerebral palsy from birth.

Somehow, with a helper he was able to finish elementary school. Gradually the curvature in his spine advanced, and it became difficult for him, with his limited physical strength and mental capacity, to keep pace with normal children, so he had to drop out of school.

When summer came, people in our Go-tanda neighborhood used to go out in two's and three's to get something cool to drink at one of the little shops, or to take a walk. My child wanted to do this too, but I wouldn't go with him, being ashamed to be seen walking with an awkward cripple. Some people we met actually would look back after passing us and laugh, pointing their fingers at us! The memory pierces a parent's heart like a needle.

"Your father doesn't feel like taking a walk today: he has a very bad headache." "Today I'm terribly busy with my work..." I made excuses right and left.

When I couldn't get out of it and had to take him for a walk, I chose streets I knew very well my son would not enjoy--dark, unfrequented alleys.

He wanted to go to the lively places, streets lit with acetylene lamps, where you could try your luck catching goldfish or buy cotton candy.

Then God dealt me a hammer blow, with which to reflect on my half-heartedness.

Early in May I had gone to Shikoku on business. It was a trip that I was making

despite my doctor's warning to take it easy because of my high blood pressure.

Suddenly I suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and collapsed on the street in a coma. My left side was completely paralyzed.

In the midst of this extremity I first came to an awareness of the poverty of my love and my negative attitude toward my boy. I wept half the night, confessing to God my arrogance, self-centeredness and failure to love.

For the whole nineteen years of his life this child had borne the cross of being unacceptable to the only two parents he had. If we, his own flesh and blood, didn't love him, who would? We had no excuse.

From that time on we made this son of ours the treasure of our home. I took the initiative in taking walks with him. When we received something, we offered it to him first. When guests visited us, he was introduced first.

When, after weeping over my arrogance, I became aware of God's limitless grace and pulled myself together, my illness improved greatly. After two years I had made an almost miraculous recovery. During this period both my second son and second daughter received baptism.

Time passed. In a week we were to celebrate our son's 40th birthday. Then, on April 4th last year, after an illness of just four days, our son was called to be with the Lord. Our home suddenly lost its treasure.

The time came for the wake. How many would come to pay their respects to one who had been isolated from normal social contact? We wanted to prepare something
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THE KYODAN CONFESSION OF FAITH (Part I. History)

(by Helen Post)

With the thought that it may be of help in understanding the present situation in the Kyodan with regard to the Confession of Faith and ministerial examinations, a short history of the Confession is given below. Part II in May will consider what has made the Confession the center of the controversy over the procedures by which candidates for the ministry are examined.

The formation of The United Church of Christ in Japan (Nippon Kirisuto Kyodan) in June of 1941 is usually seen as having had two impetuses; one, the long-time desire of Japanese Christians for a united witness; two, immediate historical events in which a military government, seeking to extend control over civilian life, passed the Religious Organizations' Law that required the consolidation of religious bodies.

When the more than 30 denominations came together to form the Kyodan, they did so not on the basis of a Confession of Faith which they had established. Talks on union over the years had not progressed that far.

While most of the churches that came into the Kyodan were in the stream of the Protestant Reformation, they represented a wide variety of confessional and creedal positions, including a disavowal of the need for creedal statements.

The Rev. Akitada Miyazaki observed that the special characteristic of the Kyodan lay in the fact that more than 30 different denominations that had had little contact united on this one point: That they were churches in the "evangelical" tradition.¹

The first Constitution and Bylaws stated that the Kyodan accepted the Old and New Testaments as its canon and conformed to the Apostles' Creed and to other Confessions of Faith.

Reorganization

The war ended in August, 1945; in October the Religious Organizations' Law was rescinded, and churches and organizations were free to choose to be or not to be in the Kyodan. Some, particularly Anglican, Lutheran, Salvation Army and Southern Baptist, withdrew, although among them were congregations that remained in the Kyodan.

In October 1946, the 4th General Assembly accepted a revised Constitution. One of the revisions added the statement that the Kyodan is part of the church universal, identified with the historical continuity of the Christian church. The Assembly also named a committee to draft a creed, to be brought to the next Assembly.

A confession was drafted but shelved due to the persistence of "blocks" organized informally along former denominational lines. What was submitted to the 1948 Assembly, instead, was a revision that chang-

ed the 1941 wording from "conforms to" to "confesses" the Apostles' Creed; it retained the statement that the Kyodan "conforms" to the ecumenical creeds and evangelical faith. By this step, according to the Rev. Kazo Kitamori, the Kyodan qualified as a "confessing church."²

At that time, the chairman of the committee proposing the change reportedly was asked, "Does 'to confess the Apostles' Creed' mean it has binding power?" and replied, "Yes."

Reflecting on this twenty years later, the Rev. Masatoshi Fukuda noted that the chairman's reply did not eliminate the vagueness afterwards with regard to the authority of the creed, nor was there any effort later to achieve consensus on an understanding of the creed.³

Resolving Barriers

In an effort to resolve the obstacles represented by strong denominational loyalties, a report on the problem was brought to the 1950 General Assembly. It declared that all churches should "enter into fellowship with others," as set forth in the preamble to the Constitution. This, according to Kitamori, became the starting point for acceptance of a common confession of faith.

In 1951, a special committee was named to draft a Confession of Faith for presentation to the 1954 Assembly. In the fall of 1953, it presented its final draft to the 1,600 persons at "The Mission of the Church" conference and received general approval, looking to its presentation to the General Assembly the following year.

This draft, the committee said, had been wrought out of the differing views of the church in Protestant history which churches in the Kyodan held. The committee had had many bitter experiences before reaching the point where it was able to bring forth this Confession for the Kyodan to consider as a corporate confession.

There appear to have been two major storm centers: One was tension between the position that a confession is something made by a particular church and the position that it is something made by a group of churches together. The second was the debate between those who emphasized "freedom of faith" and considered a confession as necessarily "voluntary," and those who accepted a confes-

sion as having some authority and being to some extent, "binding."

The view taken by the draft committee was that "voluntary" and "binding" are not mutually exclusive. The Confession that it drafted attempted to resolve the controversies by the statement that "the creed binds those who confess it voluntarily."*

Miyazaki noted that while having their own traditions, the churches painfully and patiently sought a confession which would be mutually inclusive.

For many people, the Kyodan was not a "church" if it did not have a Confession of its own. Thus, when a great majority of the delegates at the 1954 General Assembly stood to show acceptance for the Kyodan Confession of Faith, it was seen as marking the emergence of the Kyodan as a "true church."

The Kyodan Confession of Faith locates the source of authority in the Scriptures, confesses the triune God as revealed in Jesus Christ, declares the evangelical nature of the faith, and sets forth the primary doc-

trines found in the creeds of evangelical Protestant churches since the Reformation. It leads into the Apostles' Creed, by which the Kyodan is related historically and ecumenically to other communions, including Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican.

Kitamori, of the Confession Committee, has said that this Confession sets forth the doctrines "even more evangelically" than did the creeds of the Reformation churches....⁴

Dr. Hidenobu Kuwada observed, "The Confession is not just a compilation of the common points found or emphasized in the various creeds but returns to the very basic points identifying evangelical churches since the Protestant Reformation."⁵

Acceptance of the Confession was, then, a landmark in the maturing of the Kyodan. The previous controversies subsided. For the next fifteen years the Confession provided a unifying core for the life of the church.

Sources:

- (1) Miyazaki Akitada, Warera wa shinzu, Nippon Kirisuto Kyodan Shuppankyoku, 1966, 1968.
- (2) Kitamori Kazo, "Movements of the Kyodan Interpreted--The Kyodan 25 Years--from the viewpoint of the Doctrine of the Church" (translation) Kyodan Shimpo #3490, Oct. 15, 1966.
- (3) Fukuda Masatoshi, "The United Church's Confession of Faith--Its History and the Significance of Its Formation" (translation) Shinto no Tomo, June, 1972.
- (4) Kitamori Kazo, Shinko Kokuhaku Kaisetsu, Nippon Kirisuto Kyodan Shuppankyoku, 1955, 1968.
- (5) Kuwada Hidenobu, Shinko Kokuhaku, Nippon Kirisuto Kyodan Shuppankyoku, 1970, 1973.

*The word jihatsusei (自発性) has been translated "voluntary"; kosokusei (拘束性) "binding."

With regard to the article on "Prospects for Ministerial Examinations," page 2 of the March 20 issue, we are advised that a better translation of shinko kokuhaku o hozuru Kyodan no shiken, (which was translated "a test given by the Kyodan which respects the Confession of Faith") would be "a test given by the Kyodan which stands on the Confession of Faith."

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COC-KYODAN DEBATE

The "history and problem areas of Japan-North American church relations" came in for further discussion at the spring full meeting of the Council of Cooperation, March 26, with the "Saeki paper" the starting point (See KNL No. 101, Feb. 20, and page 4 of this issue.)

A panel of three persons began the discussion, which then spread to the larger membership. A number of persons were attending their first meeting.

The Rev. Ichiro Ono, vice moderator of the Kyodan, felt the need to clarify

what is meant by the "Japan side" when certain positions are ascribed to it, in view of the variety of positions and organizations.

He also questioned the dichotomy made between "issue-centered mission" and "institution-centered mission" as applied respectively to North America and Japan. "We can't say simply 'This is issue-centered,' and 'That is institution-centered,'" he said. "We have to find the third point from which a new circle can be drawn embracing both of the other two."

Later several other people made the point that "issues

are raised by particular times and situations, but institutions are necessary in order to deal with the issues...."

Koichi Oshima, president of Joshi Gakuin, dealt with church-school relationships. "The problem is that there is no place within the church where my school or I can take up our concerns," he said. "Our position is a very lonely one...."

Another educator said that, even though the schools have become "secularized," the relationship to the Christian faith continues. "And it is not just a matter of my being a member of a Kyodan

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church. It lies in the fact that we want to move together. If we don't, what can we say for the future of evangelism in Japan?"

The third panelist, Shiro Abe, laid the source of the breach between the Kyodan and social work in the organization of the Kyodan in 1941 when social work was placed outside the perimeter of the church. He traced the development of the Christian Social Work League and its attempts to reestablish relationships with the Kyodan. He noted that social work institutions have continually

played the role of stimulating the Kyodan toward its responsibility in society.

He urged that the Saeki report be recognized as representing the position of the COC.

Several persons pointed out that there are various interpretations of the "Kyodan struggle" in addition to the one given in the paper.

In the discussion period, the Rev. Tokunaga, Goro, one of the new Kyodan representatives, posed some of the questions being asked about COC--limitations because of being set in the context of

Japan-North America relations, the understanding in COC of the significance of events in the Kyodan in recent years.

Kyodan Moderator Isuke Toda, who chairs the COC meetings, emphasized that the Saeki report deals with the history of relationships within COC and between the COC and North American churches, and that it is the future form of these relationships that is to be decided from now on.

Toda reported that the July meeting of the Kyodan Executive Committee will discuss the Kyodan and the COC.

NOTE: In the article on Japan-North America church relations on page 2 of the February 20 issue, the first sentence in paragraph 2 should read: the paper... was accepted at the November full meeting of the Council of Cooperation and approval was given for it to be presented to the JNAC meeting.

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to serve, though it would be very modest. At least there would be those assisting us. Thirty? Forty? Fifty? Time was running out. Someone suggested eighty, and we ordered accordingly.

When the service was almost over, I happened to look back over my shoulder, and was amazed. The only persons seated were the pastor and I. All the rest were standing, filling the room. More were standing on the lawn.

Few of them were Christians. We sang in unison, following with tear-filled eyes the words to the hymns on the song sheets that had been distributed.

More than ninety people came that night, neighborhood people for the most part, in Tokyo, where it is said that relationships are very thin beyond the third house. There

was someone there from every household, and even some from the shopping street some 600 meters away. I was dumbfounded.

"Your son was always smiling and liked talking to people..."

"He had such a sunny disposition..."

"He was so gentle..."

To us, his parents too, he was a gentle person. He always remembered the birthday of each family member and would give some kind of a gift. On the anniversaries of the deaths of my parents, he would place flowers, even when I forgot. He was that kind of a person.

I experienced directly the truth of those words: *It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.*

(from *Ginza no Kane*, April 4, 1976
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* FROM THE REPORT OF SECTION: WHAT UNITY REQUIRES

* TO THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES' FIFTH ASSEMBLY, Nairobi, Kenya, 1975

"The Church's unity must embrace both those who are whole and those who are disabled....

.....How can the Church open itself to the witness which Christ extends through them?"

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